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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 001556

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2015

TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: HIZB-UT TAHRIR ACTIVE IN ISTANBUL

REF: A. TASHKENT 2182

[B](#). ANKARA 5233

[C](#). ISTANBUL 383

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K.Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (U) Members of the radical Islamic organization Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT) staged a protest and delivered a press statement after Friday prayers at Fatih Mosque in Istanbul on September

[2](#). Calling for the the reinstatement of the Caliphate, HT's putative leader in Turkey, Yilmaz Celik, reportedly called Mustafa Kemal Ataturk the "criminal of the century" for having abolished that institution. In a 24-page press statement, with an estimated 500 protestors in attendance, Celik outlined how "imperialist infidels, with the help of Muslim and Arab traitors," assisted Ataturk in the overthrow of the Caliphate State, and lamented that Muslims today suffer from disorganization and division as a result.

[2](#). (U) Police were present during the protest, but observed the events without intervening or attempting to detain Celik.

Their inaction in the face of the public denigration of Ataturk was broadcast on CNN Turk and NTV on September 2 and has been roundly criticized, including by Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin. Police officials responded that they were acting with restraint in the face of provocation. According to press reports, the Fatih Chief Prosecutor ordered the arrest of ten participants, including Celik. Seven persons were detained, and five have since been released. Celik is still being sought by police. On September 7, he reportedly sent a fax to a number of newspapers promising that one day HT would be flying the Caliphate flag.

[3](#). (C) Istanbul security directorate sources told a consulate officer that police had arrested several HT members in operations during March 2005 for "being members of a terrorist organization." They indicated, however, that the detainees were released and charges dropped by prosecutors. They were thus especially upset with public criticism of the lack of police reaction on September 2, arguing that with the prosecutor's decision they had no legal basis to detain them.

(Note: Previously, an Adana court reportedly called the group a terrorist organization in 2004 for its support of sharia law, and implicitly, its favoring an overthrow of the constitutional order, but since members of the group have not been proven to have used violence and force to support their goals, they have not been put on Turkey's list of terrorist organizations. End note.)

[4](#). (U) In addition to the group's event at Fatih Mosque, HT has been active in Istanbul's main pedestrian zone recently, distributing leaflets stating that "the infidel USA has become proud, spoiled and rabid with its power," "September 11 was used as an excuse for the crusade," and that "our Muslim brothers (in Afghanistan) were decimated in masses" before "Iraqi soil became trodden with the filthy boots of the infidels."

[5](#). (C) Comment: Hizb-ut Tahrir has operated relatively under the radar screen in Turkey, especially when compared to the group's profile in Central Asia. The debate about the nature of HT may pick up after this Fatih incident, however, which has sparked outrage among many Turks, expressions of which we have heard in conversation on the streets of Istanbul on more than one occasion. Cumhuriyet claimed in a September 7 report that HT has been infiltrated by Turkish Hizbullah. Beyond the issue of terrorism, however, it is interesting to note that Turkish police and prosecutors here have not usually been so shy about using Article 301 to pursue those who defame the state or Ataturk; for example, author Orhan Pamuk faces charges for controversial comments made about the massacre of Armenians and other issues (ref B). Some read into this inaction on September 2 a connection to the harsh criticism police experienced for their overenthusiastic response in breaking up a March Women's Day protest (ref C). Turkish security officials continue to grapple with defining their post EU-reforms role in guaranteeing the safety and security of citizens while facilitating freedom of speech and assembly.

JONES